



2008 – International Year of the Potato

The humble potato is finally getting some big-league recognition in the wake of a United Nations declaration that names 2008 as the International Year of the Potato.

Why, the potato? The United Nations chose to honour the lowly spud to help raise awareness of the important role potatoes can play in addressing the challenges of hunger, poverty and threats to the environment.

With a 2007 production level of almost 320 million tonnes, the potato is the world's number-one non-grain food commodity and the fourth-leading food crop in the world after maize, wheat and rice.

Canada is the 12th largest potato producer in the world, with production close to 5 million tonnes in 2006.

The potato is the most important vegetable crop in Canada, generating sales of \$911 million in 2006 and representing 35 per cent of all vegetable farm cash receipts.

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) has earned an international reputation for developing high-quality French fry, chip and fresh market potatoes for domestic and foreign markets.

AAFC conducts research in many of the world's leading food crops at several of its 19 research centres located across Canada.

Potatoes are a popular choice in Canadian households, according to a survey conducted recently by the Potato Innovation Network 2020, an organization striving to change the way we look at potatoes. Of the Canadians polled, 85 per cent had potatoes in their home and 59 per cent had purchased potatoes in the last week. Potato Innovation Network 2020 is looking at new, higher-value opportunities for the potato, including new products based on growing evidence of the health benefits associated with eating spuds.



Currently, Canadians consume about 65 kilograms of potatoes per capita – about the same amount as the combined total of all other fresh vegetables consumed.

And why shouldn't we? Potatoes are nutritious and wholesome, and supply many important nutrients in our diet. Potatoes are high in potassium and vitamin C. In fact, one medium-sized potato contains about half the daily vitamin C requirement. They are also a good source of vitamin B6, thiamine, iron, folic acid, and if the skin is eaten, dietary fibre. In addition, scientists are working on developing more healthy varieties of potatoes with increased fibre levels to improve health benefits.

But even if you don't eat them, potatoes can still be useful in your life: potato starch can be used in the pharmaceutical, textile, wood and paper industries and as a 100-per-cent biodegradable substitute for polystyrene and other plastics.

That's not all. Potato peel and other waste from potato processing can be liquefied and fermented to produce fuel-grade ethanol.

For more information, visit www.agr.gc.ca.

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